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PEACEKEEPING ON THE GOLAN HEIGHTS: ASSESSING U.S. PARTICIPATION

by

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ABSTRACT

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The signing of a peace accord between Israel and Syria may hinge on the willingness of the United States to provide peacekeepers to monitor the Golan Heights. From the viewpoint of the U.S. national interest, this paper examines the costs, risks, and benefits of deploying a force. It concludes that the strategic benefits outweigh the costs, and that the United States should provide peacekeepers if requested by both Israel and Syria. This commitment would promote stability in a volatile region which is a high priority on the U.S. foreign policy agenda. In a Golan peacekeeping scenario, Israel and Syria view the United States as uniquely qualified to address their domestic, political, and security concerns. There are costs and risks, but when balanced against the potential benefits of a peace accord between Israel and Syria, they are acceptable.

To enhance the success and minimize some of the cost, the authors make six recommendations for this prospective mission. While these recommendations for improvement specifically target a Golan deployment, they may also be applied to peacekeeping missions in general. Lessons learned from other peace operations are incorporated where relevant. The recommendations address the following areas for improvement:

- Unit evaluation criteria
- In-theater training opportunities
- Deployment rotation schedule
- Unit-level political and cultural training
- Public and Congressional support
- Exit strategy

Despite the burden that an additional peacekeeping mission may place on the U.S. military, a Golan commitment may be necessary when viewed within the context of U.S. regional interests. As it assumes a larger role in such operations, the military must continue to adjust its doctrine, structure, and culture.

Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Acknowledgements	ii
Executive Summary	iii
Chapter 1, Introduction	1
Chapter 2, Costs and Risks on the Golan	5
Chapter 3, Benefits for the United States	16
Chapter 4, Recommendations for Improvement	27
Chapter 5, Final Reflections	38
Appendix 1, Golan Peacekeeping and PDD-25	40
Appendix 2, Background on the Golan	43
Appendix 3, Key Dates Affecting the Golan	46
Works Consulted	47

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Executive Summary

The signing of a peace accord between Israel and Syria may hinge on the willingness of the United States to provide peacekeepers to monitor the Golan Heights. From the viewpoint of the U.S. national interest, this paper examines the costs, risks, and benefits of deploying a force. It concludes that the strategic benefits outweigh the costs, and that the United States should provide peacekeepers if requested by both Israel and Syria. This commitment would promote stability in a volatile region which is a high priority on the U.S. foreign policy agenda. In a Golan peacekeeping scenario, Israel and Syria view the United States as uniquely qualified to address their domestic, political, and security concerns. There are costs and risks, but when balanced against the potential benefits of a peace accord between Israel and Syria, they are acceptable.

To enhance the success and minimize some of the cost, the authors make six recommendations for this prospective mission. While these recommendations for improvement specifically target a Golan deployment, they may also be applied to peacekeeping missions in general. Lessons learned from other peace operations are incorporated where relevant. The recommendations address the following areas for improvement:

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Summary of Costs, Risks, and Benefits

Costs and Risks

- Risk of casualties
- Potential for mission creep
- Financial cost
- Undermining Israel's self-reliance
- Reduction in combat readiness
- Impact on the volunteer force

Benefits

- Increased regional stability
- Strengthened relationship with Israel
- Improved relations with Arab states
- Containment of renegade states
- Strengthened international image
- Reduced weapons proliferation

Chapter 1

Introduction

As Israel and Syria continue to posture for an historic peace accord, the United States has expressed a willingness to provide peacekeepers to the Golan Heights if requested by both nations. This paper evaluates the costs, risks, and benefits of a Golan mission from the perspective of the U.S. national interest. It concludes that if Israel and Syria ask for U.S. peacekeepers as a prerequisite for signing an accord, the United States should support this request, as it would advance U.S. foreign policy goals in a vital region. The strategic benefits of a peace accord to the United States outweigh the costs and risks of a deployment. If a U.S. peacekeeping mission proves necessary, military decision makers can lessen some of the cost with advance planning and coordination. To that end, the authors make six recommendations that would enhance a prospective Golan mission. The recommendations target peacekeeping training, deployment length, public support, and exit strategy.

The debate on the growing U.S. commitment to peace operations comes at a time when the country is dramatically downsizing its military. In 1986, the United States had approximately 1,000 soldiers involved in peacekeeping missions, virtually all of which were in the Multinational Forces and Observers (MFO) mission in Egypt. Since then, U.S. commitment to peace operations has increased nearly twenty-five fold, and in 1996, there are approximately 24,100 U.S. peacekeeping troops stationed abroad.

While U.S. citizens consider this increasing commitment to peacekeeping around the

globe, developments in the Middle East may necessitate even further obligation. Against the backdrop of Israel's recently signed agreements with Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization, an Israeli-Syrian accord may be achievable for the first time since 1948. However, the prospect of this accord may hinge on U.S. willingness to provide peacekeepers.

Although stationing U.S. peacekeepers on the Golan should ideally be a last resort, no other option seems viable. The preferred options would be self-policing by Israel and Syria or a United Nations monitoring force with limited U.S. participation, but the parties will probably not agree to these choices. Israel's reluctance to trust a United Nations force dates back to the sudden evacuation of U.N. troops from the Sinai prior to the Six Day War in 1967. While the Golan disengagement zone established by the United Nations has been quiet since 1974, it is implausible to attribute this peace to U.N. supervision. Both Israel and Syria have chosen to honor the cease-fire out of self-interest. Their decisions are influenced little by the U.N. mission (UNDOF), which is thinly spread along the eastern border of the Golan.¹ Only a few miles away, the U.N. peacekeepers in southern Lebanon (UNIFIL) have not been able to deter hostilities.² During the last ten years, hundreds of Israelis and Arabs have died in UNIFIL's security zone. If foreign peacekeepers were necessary on the Golan, most Israelis would want a U.S. military force, even if it were established under U.N. auspices.

Syria has also indicated that it would accept U.S. soldiers on the Golan. It has minimal respect for the deterrent value of a United Nations force. When Israel launched its attack into Lebanon during Operation Peace for Galilee in 1982, the U.N. troops did not interfere with the advance of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) or their occupation of Beirut. More importantly, with the collapse of its Soviet benefactor, Syria seeks to improve its relationship with

Washington. This prospect would also encourage Syria's President Hafez Assad to accept U.S. peacekeepers. A U.S. or U.S.-led force fulfills the basic requirement for a traditional peacekeeping force: the consent of both parties.

Before embarking on a course of action involving major implications and long-range commitments, U.S. policy makers should first consider the principal costs, risks, and benefits. The authors examine each factor in two ways: its relative importance to the United States; and, its likelihood of occurrence. While developing recommendations to enhance mission effectiveness, lessons from past peace operations are also assessed for their applicability to a Golan scenario. These recommendations should be considered prior to deployment and are within the purview of military decision makers to implement.

Notes

1. UNDOF is the abbreviation for United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. It was established by Security Council Resolution 350 in May 1974.
2. UNIFIL is the abbreviation for United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. It was established by Security Council Resolution 425 in March 1978.

Chapter 2

Costs and Risks on the Golan

"They Came in Peace"

Inscription on the memorial at Camp Johnson, Jacksonville, North Carolina,
to the 241 Marines and other servicemen killed in Beirut in 1983

The discussion of a prospective Golan mission comes at a time when many question the growing commitment of U.S. forces to peacekeeping operations. Therefore, the potential risks and costs of a U.S. deployment must be carefully examined, as each may have long-term implications for the United States. This chapter addresses the six most significant:

- Risk of casualties
- Potential for mission creep
- Financial cost
- Undermining Israel's self-reliance
- Reduction in combat readiness
- Impact on the volunteer military

Risk of Casualties

Worldwide experience illustrates the personal risk to those engaged in peace operations. From its establishment in 1945 to 1993, the United Nations reported 2502 casualties among peacekeepers, and through 1994, 1194 died performing their duties.¹

Military casualties have always been a sensitive issue, especially when outside the

context of wars of survival. In assessing the impact of casualties on public support, Michael Gordon and Lieutenant General (Ret.) Bernard Trainor state that “the assumption in the Pentagon today is that any military incursion must be low in cost to be politically feasible.”² This is particularly true of peace operations, which the public believes should be nearly casualty-free. On Capitol Hill, U.S. Representative Joel Hefley (R-Colorado) described his standard for support during the debate on Bosnia in these terms: “My criteria in trying to decide on things like this is whether or not I could go to a family of someone, a young person who's come home in a body bag, and explain to that family how this young American has done a great thing for his country.”³ When discussing the risk of a possible Golan peacekeeping mission, opponents often cite the loss of 241 Marines in the 1983 Beirut mission.⁴

Despite the concerns mentioned above, the risk of casualties in a Golan mission would not be great enough to prevent a deployment. Certainly, in any Middle East scenario there is a threat of terrorism. Soldiers on the Golan would be possible targets; however, the actual danger should be minimal. Returning to the Beirut analogy, the Golan situation would be much different, both in political climate and location of troops. The Beirut peacekeepers were located in a chaotic urban situation, surrounded by competing and hostile militias. In contrast, the Golan force would be there with the sanction of two states with an interest in U.S. support. Despite its tacit sponsorship of Hezbollah terrorism in southern Lebanon, Syria has kept the Golan border quiet since the cease-fire with Israel. The current U.N. monitoring force (UNDOF) has suffered no casualties since its inception of its mission in 1974. If Syria signs a peace accord, it is presumed that a cessation of terrorist activity in Lebanon would also be included. Assad has proved that he can and will clamp down on terrorism when it is in his interest to do so.

No military operation is free of risk, and the Golan would be no exception. If the United States commits a peacekeeping force, casualties may occur in isolated incidents. Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that these casualties would be incurred while supporting U.S. foreign policy--not while defending Israel or Syria. Although loss of life is an emotional issue, its relative low probability makes this an acceptable risk. Other risks, such as the risk of assuming additional collateral missions, may be more likely.

Potential for Mission Creep

History reminds us of the cost of intervening in regional conflicts where U.S. forces lacked well-defined operational and political objectives. Attempts at peacekeeping in Lebanon and Somalia provide recent examples of mission creep, which is the term used when describing operations whose nature changes with the addition of missions not foreseen at the time of deployment.

Could the lessons of Lebanon and Somalia apply to the Golan? The United States may be asked to assume additional roles or missions not originally envisioned. After the withdrawal of Jewish settlers, Syria will be eager to repopulate its territory. U.S. troops may be asked to guard valuable water supply lines, clear mine fields, or help with civil engineering projects. With long-term peacekeeping commitments, it is difficult to predict the degree of mission creep.

Shifts in the mission have adversely affected U.S. peace operations in the past, and it is a potential risk in the Middle East. Although missions beyond peacekeeping may become necessary, policy makers should carefully assess each new request. Additional tasks may be

acceptable, however, if they contribute to U.S. regional interests.

Financial Cost

Because the mission has yet to be defined, it is difficult to quantify the financial cost of a lengthy commitment to Golan peacekeeping. In addition, there would undoubtedly be foreign aid and military assistance arrangements similar to those that accompanied previous Middle East peace agreements. For comparison, the MFO mission in the Sinai has an annual budget of only \$56 million,⁵ but this evolved from a much larger foreign aid package. Today, the total current aid from Camp David commits an annual outlay of \$1.8 billion to Israel and \$1.2 billion to Egypt. This aid to Israel and Egypt alone accounts for approximately 80 percent of the total U.S. security assistance to all foreign countries.⁶

Nevertheless, attaining an Israeli-Syrian accord will be cost effective to the United States over the long run. Deploying and maintaining a modest peacekeeping force would be far less expensive than the cost of deploying a much larger force if needed to intervene in a future Middle East conflict. In its pursuit of regional interests, the United States has demonstrated its willingness to pay for peace.

Undermining Israel's Self-reliance

In addressing the wisdom of providing peacekeepers, the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think-tank, stated that “a U.S. presence on the Golan . . . will sap Israeli self-reliance.”⁷ Control of the Golan contributes to Israel's strategic deterrence and defensive

position. Deterrence is based on Israeli armored units stationed within easy striking range of Damascus, while topography provides the defensive advantage over a much larger Syrian force. Since 1973, this situation has provided Israel with a de facto peace with Syria. If Israel returns this strategic land, it will be forced to abandon its secure defense posture. Without the Golan, the IDF would lose reaction time and maneuvering space. These disadvantages could dictate a greater emphasis by Israel on a preemptive strike strategy.

With Israel in a less defendable position, U.S. concerns in the region could become more complex. To ensure its security, Israel might insist on a more robust peacekeeping force than the United States is willing to provide. Furthermore, U.S. leadership would be placed in a difficult position if the IDF reacted to a perceived threat, and in doing so, endangered the peacekeepers.

Historically, the Israeli government has not always looked to the United States for defense or approval. In some cases, it has ignored requests for restraint and can be expected to do so again, regardless of the presence of peacekeepers.⁸ On occasion, Israel's independent action has served U.S. interests. The Israeli preemptive attack on Iraq's nuclear reactor outside Baghdad in 1981, for example, destroyed a facility that later could have posed tremendous danger to U.S. forces in the Gulf war. Though at the time the United States publicly condemned Israel and joined the United Nations in censuring Israel for its actions, by 1991 Defense Secretary Richard Cheney stated the widely held private view: "There were many times during the course of the build-up in the Gulf and the subsequent conflict that I gave thanks for the bold and dramatic action that had been taken [by Israel] some ten years before."⁹ If Israel had formally sought U.S. endorsement, the mission probably would have been discouraged.

When discussing the impact of a Golan mission on Israeli self-reliance, it must be

remembered that a U.S. force would not be configured to defend Israel's borders. The IDF would never relinquish this role. Assuming that the Golan is exchanged for satisfactory security arrangements, the peacekeepers would be stationed on Syrian or neutral territory. U.S. presence on the Golan is a statement of commitment to Israeli-Syrian peace, and therefore, the relationship between the United States and Israel would not significantly change.

In summary, the United States has an interest in a strong, self-confident Israel, and a U.S.-led Golan force would not undermine the relationship. The peacekeepers' mission would be to monitor an accord and not to protect an ally. Because Israel views peace as fundamental to its defense strategy, helping it to achieve this goal could increase its security and self-reliance. It is for Israel to decide, along with Syria, whether U.S. peacekeepers should be part of the solution.

Reduced Combat Readiness

Turning to U.S. defense considerations, civilian and military leaders are concerned about peace operations degrading warfighting readiness. Their concerns revolve around two central issues: combat training and flexibility.

Combat missions and peace operations require vastly different mindsets and skills. Units trained for one are not always prepared for the other. A recent Heritage Foundation publication stated the traditional view of military readiness: "There is no other reason for the Pentagon to exist than to organize, outfit and train combat troops to prevail in battle over America's enemies."¹⁰ Of the four areas which are measured when evaluating unit readiness for combat

(personnel availability, equipment availability, equipment serviceability and training proficiency), it is training proficiency that is most compromised by peacekeeping missions.¹¹ The MFO mission provides a useful example.

The General Accounting Office (GAO) reported that the MFO is widely viewed as an effective, cost-efficient peacekeeping operation.¹² With two battalions (infantry and support) consisting of approximately 1,000 troops, the United States provides about 50 percent of the MFO military contingent. It is the infantry battalion that suffers most from combat readiness degradation. Peace operations necessitate a change in orientation for combat soldiers, and MFO predeployment training preempts training for traditional warfighting missions. Once deployed, the soldiers are prohibited from practicing many of their wartime skills, including live-fire training in groups larger than a platoon, the detonation of explosives, and artillery practice. From a combat readiness perspective, three battalions are affected: one training for deployment, one deployed, and one retraining after the mission. All of these face some degradation. This is the three-for-one cost to readiness ratio used by military planners when deploying soldiers as peacekeepers.¹³

The second major concern is reducing the military's flexibility to respond to other commitments, most notably, the two Major Regional Conflict (MRC) strategy. While the Army downsizes, its leadership faces an increase in number and duration of peacekeeping deployments.¹⁴ Currently, there are almost 1,000 troops in the Sinai, 20,000 in Bosnia, and residual forces in Haiti, Somalia, and other areas. In discussing a potential Golan mission, the Center for Security Affairs question the Army's ability to support two MRCs as it assumes more peace operations.¹⁵

Despite these concerns, a Golan deployment by itself would not pose a significant threat to U.S. military readiness. First, the assertion that the Pentagon's sole function is to fight wars is no longer viable. U.S. political leadership has embraced peace operations as a legitimate mission for the military. Therefore, overall force readiness should not be measured strictly in terms of ability to accomplish classic warfighting objectives.¹⁶ Second, measuring readiness is hardly an exact science. According to Lawrence Korb, the Pentagon's "readiness czar" during the Reagan administration, the military's current readiness concern is a political agenda designed to maintain Cold War funding levels.¹⁷ Although the balance between readiness for traditional warfare and peace operations has yet to be established, a modest Golan deployment would not significantly impact the combat capability of a still large and credible U.S. military.

Impact on the Volunteer Force

As the military grapples with new missions, it must also address personnel issues. In today's all-volunteer force, citizens may not choose to serve or reenlist if policies conflict with their personal ideologies, goals, or expectations. In one recent study, researchers concluded that U.S. troops serving as peacekeepers are "decidedly lukewarm to their mission."¹⁸

The amount of time that a soldier is deployed away from home affects recruiting, morale, and retention. Members of the military routinely endure hardship and stress, but continuous deployments have a cumulative effect. This is especially true for the soldiers who feel the sole purpose of the military is to fight the nation's wars and do not embrace or appreciate the value of peacekeeping.¹⁹ On the other hand, some soldiers view peace operations as opportunities to work

for world peace.

In any event, it is too early to determine the long-range impact of peacekeeping on the volunteer force. However, when discussing the effect on the military, it should be remembered that any Golan commitment would be relatively small. Although the military does face significant quality-of-life concerns, the addition of a Golan mission alone would not endanger the volunteer force. The greater challenge may be to refocus recruiting efforts to emphasize the role of the military in peace operations in addition to the traditional warfighting mission.

Conclusion

A Golan deployment would clearly present manpower, financial and political costs. Although this deployment would be relatively small, the cumulative effect of many such missions may become significant. However, to properly evaluate the advisability of a Golan mission, these costs and risks must be compared to the benefits discussed in the next chapter.

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Chapter 3

Benefits for the United States

"The United States has the power and prestige to help shape a brighter future for the people of the Middle East."¹

William J. Perry

The United States would benefit significantly from an Israeli-Syrian peace accord, which may not be possible without U.S. participation. While pursuing its interests within the context of this accord, the United States would benefit in the following areas:

- Increased regional stability
- Strengthened relationship with Israel
- Improved relations with key Arab states
- Further containment of renegade states
- Strengthened international image
- Possible reduction in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction

Many people, including Americans, Israelis and Arabs, fail to comprehend the extent of the transformation now occurring in the Middle East.² The disappearance of Soviet regional influence has removed the threat of a superpower confrontation. In the absence of Soviet patronage, Syria seeks warmer relations with Washington, both financially and militarily. Israel's recent accords with Jordan and the Palestinians have set the tone for advancing dialogue with other Arab states. As Israel and Syria continue to posture themselves for a peace accord, there are signals for increased cooperation.³ By providing a peacekeeping force at the request of both parties, the United States could play a pivotal role, and doing so, it would also reap

substantial benefits.

Increased Regional Stability

An Israeli-Syrian accord is crucial to regional stability. Greater stability contributes to peace, economic growth, and the unrestricted flow of reasonably priced oil. Israel has signed agreements with Egypt, Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization, and peace along the Lebanese border is expected to be part of the Israeli-Syrian package. Saudi Arabia may also consider more open dialogue with Israel if Syria participates. Stabilizing borders, ensuring the security of Israel, and maintaining peace in this strategic area are important U.S. foreign policy objectives.

When discussing negotiations with Syria, Itamar Rabinovich, Israel's ambassador to the United States, stated:

We have a full-fledged peace agreement with Jordan, and a degree of normalization with the rest of the Arab world. Arabs realize that this is an irreversible fact. What is glaringly absent from all this is the Syrian-Israeli agreement. Syria presents the last danger of a full-fledged conventional war on our border.⁴

However, the benefit of an accord is not limited to mere border stability. Since to a great extent Syria controls events in Lebanon, Israel would address their persistent security problem through the accord. The hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel in March of this year underscore the volatility of the Lebanese situation.⁵ Furthermore, if Syria improves its relations with the United

States, it would allow Washington to confront the important issues of Lebanese sovereignty, terrorism, drug trafficking, and human rights.⁶ The United States could use the prospect of normalized diplomatic relations as leverage to address each of these concerns.

Assad is a key player in the Arab community, and improving his relationship with Washington would enhance his prestige with pro-western Arab leaders. "It is not the same Syria as before--because of objective circumstances that are forcing Syria into painful shifts of policy," says Peter Rodman, a former White House and State Department official.⁷ The new Syria might be induced to deny safe-haven to terrorists in Lebanon and on its own soil. Assad could also halt the resupply through Syria of Iranian-backed Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon and possibly take steps to disarm them. By clamping down on the Bekka Valley drug cultivators, the "Medellian drug cartel of the East,"⁸ Assad would remove an important source of income for the terrorists.⁹ As Secretary of State Warren Christopher stated, "The United States would clearly benefit by addressing these transnational threats in an interdependent world."¹⁰

The common thread and essential ingredient for an accord may be a U.S. military presence. As recently summarized by Richard Haass, director of Middle Eastern Affairs at the National Security Council during the Bush administration, "Peace with Syria would bring peace with Lebanon, ties with other Arab states, pressure on the Palestinians to be pragmatic and opportunities for regional commerce. . . . But peace will come only if the U.S. is directly involved."¹¹ As the sole superpower and a nation with strong interest in Middle East peace, the United States is uniquely qualified to address the domestic, political, and security concerns of both Israel and Syria.

For decades, the Middle East has been an enormous drain on manpower, equipment, and

money as the United States has sought to help stabilize the region. With each signed accord, there is greater potential for reducing the commitment of U.S. resources and preventing a costly military intervention. Continued U.S. commitment would preserve its influence and access to this vital region.

Strengthened Relationship with Israel

In its quest for greater regional stability, the United States must assess the impact of this accord on its longtime relationship with Israel. The U.S. government would need to balance its support for Israel against the expectation of impartiality. This may be challenging as illustrated by U.S. participation in the 1982-1984 multinational peacekeeping force in Lebanon. This mission “led to considerable friction with Israel, and at one point, an American Marine officer brandished a pistol to halt the advance of an Israeli tank.”¹² Certainly with U.S. soldiers on the Golan there could be tension, but the potential for confrontation is low. U.S. peacekeepers would be involved only by Israeli request. By actively promoting peace, they would ultimately help strengthen the relationship.

As stated, U.S. interests are best served by a strategic partnership with a strong and self-confident ally and one that can trust U.S. commitment.¹³ The traditional U.S. relationship with Israel has been evolving from the role of military sponsor to that of a broker for peace accords. Recent experience has shown that only the United States, with its close relationship to Israel, can fulfill this task. Helping Israel forge better relationships with Arab states will increase its long-term security and strengthen, rather than undermine, the close bond.

Improved Relations with Key Arab States

Strengthening partnerships with key Arab states is also vital to the overall U.S. strategy. Oil at reasonable prices, military basing rights, and investment opportunities are just a few of many foreign policy considerations. Syria warrants particular attention because achieving a comprehensive Middle East peace plan is impossible without its participation.

Since Israel captured the Golan in 1967, it has claimed sovereignty and resettled the area with nearly 14,000 Israeli citizens. For almost 30 years, Syria has attempted to regain its lost land through international pressure, and U.S. policy has favored Syria's territorial claim. U.S. administrations have consistently refused to recognize the Golan as part of Israel.¹⁴ In his recent address to the U.N. General Assembly, Syrian Foreign Minister al-Sharaa stated, "among the guarantees given to Syria by the United States of America was that it does not agree to the annexation by Israel of one single foot of the Golan territory occupied in 1967."¹⁵ Ultimately, the United States will encourage the parties to resolve the boundaries through negotiation.

Not surprisingly, the rest of the Arab world views U.S. backing for returning the Golan to Syria as a signal of both consistency in policy and support for Arab interests. This contributes to improved relations with Arab states and reduces impediments to cooperation. In the long term, it is the lingering psychological barriers, more than the physical risks on the Golan, that are the main challenge to U.S. diplomacy in the region.¹⁶ By helping move Assad toward the mainstream, Washington will improve its relations with other Arab nations.

Containing Renegade States

Establishing better relations with Syria has the additional benefit of further containing renegade states, such as Libya, Iran, and Iraq. With a peace accord, Syria would join the ranks of more moderate Arab nations and distance itself from countries which openly violate norms of international behavior.

As Syria retreats further from rogue nations, the opportunities for Hezbollah and radical Palestinian groups to sabotage the peace process would be reduced. Furthermore, a shift by Syria would advance the U.S. interest in the dual containment of Iran and Iraq.¹⁷ The spread of Islamic extremism from Iran poses more of a threat to peace than a military invasion by Syria.¹⁸ As Ze'ev Schiff, a senior Israeli military correspondent, summarized: "An accord would not destroy Syria's relations with Iran, but it would certainly distance the two nations."¹⁹ This separation would increase the security of U.S. interests and support the foreign policy goal of containing unfriendly nations.

Strengthened International Image

For almost half a century, the United States has invested enormous diplomatic capital in the Middle East peace process. Ten U.S. administrations have pursued a peace plan for 47 years.²⁰ From the conference in Madrid to the countless shuttle diplomacy missions, the United States has led the peace process. Both the Bush and Clinton administrations have publicly stated their willingness to station troops on the Golan.²¹ If the United States failed to follow through, its international credibility could suffer.

Does the United States have the resolve and perseverance to deploy soldiers? While discussing the perception of U.S. commitment to military operations, defense analyst Vincent Davis explained there is a “curious public schizophrenia in which Americans seem on the one hand to favor their nation’s active involvement . . . but, on the other hand, believe and trust that this will require no significant sacrifices from them.”²²

U.S. citizens opposed to involvement cite physical risks, budget constraints, and logistical problems as reasons to stay home. But this logic misses the point. The rationale for a U.S. role is strategic, not military or technical.²³ As a superpower, the United States must be seen as a nation that will remain engaged and be willing to accept risk and cost. If the United States hopes to maintain credibility with its allies, it must be a dependable security partner. A U.S. deployment serves as a political symbol of commitment, which in turn, boosts its global stock.

Reduced Weapons Proliferation

As a world leader, the United States should explore every avenue for reducing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Syria has been actively developing a long-range ballistic missile capability and a nonconventional arsenal in response to Israel’s purported nuclear capability. Certainly in the current political environment, there is no possibility of arms control.²⁴ Although it may take many years, an Israeli-Syrian accord could eventually contribute to a reduction in the proliferation of biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons.

A more comprehensive peace plan might also encourage the parties to slow weapons

development programs as they feel more secure. In its *Strategic Assessment 1995*, the National Defense University makes the following appraisal:

Recent successes in the Arab-Israeli peace process offer the prospect for the first time of transforming the security environment of the Middle East. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Arab-Israel front had one of the world's highest concentrations of advanced weaponry. If the peace process broadens to include a Syrian-Israeli accord and deepens with a final status agreement between Israelis and Palestinians, the Levant states are likely to move towards smaller militaries with older weapons. Furthermore, security cooperation patterns could change, as Israel ceases to be pariah.²⁵

The United States has continually sought to reduce the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and an Israeli-Syrian accord presents another opportunity. Immediate results are unlikely, but the long-term effect of the accord may discourage weapons production and acquisition. Furthermore, if Syria signs an accord and stops its sponsorship of terrorism, this more unpredictable threat could also be reduced. A dangerous characteristic of terrorists, says General (Ret.) John Galvin, is that "they like an ever bigger bang."²⁶ Any reduction in the proliferation of these weapons serves U.S. interests.

Conclusion

U.S. peacekeepers on the Golan may satisfy the conditions of a long-awaited peace

accord. By committing peacekeepers, the strategic advantages to the United States outweigh the costs and risks. If requested by Israel and Syria, the United States should provide a military force to support an accord. Well-timed and decisive U.S. leadership increases the likelihood of future access and influence in a vital region and furthers the U.S. foreign policy agenda. The next chapter addresses proposals for enhancing the success of such a mission.

Notes

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4. Itamar Rabinovich, as quoted in "Rabin Memorialized in Forum," *Update* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University, November/December 1995) 2.
5. Walid Ahmad Khalidi, Senior Research Fellow, Center for Middle East Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, personal interview, 5 May 1996.
6. Andrew Bacevich, Michael Eisenstadt and Carl Ford, *Supporting Peace: America's Role in an Israel-Syrian Peace Agreement* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1994) 42.
7. Peter W. Rodman and Douglas J. Feith, "Policing the Golan: Pro and Con," *Midstream*, April 1995, 7.
8. Yoram Ettinger, "Could the U.S. Sustain a Golan Presence?" *The Washington Times*, 3 August 1994, A15.
9. Bacevich, et al, 38.
10. Secretary of State Warren Christopher in an address at the John F. Kennedy School of Government forum, Harvard University, 18 January 1996.
11. Michael Greenspon and William Wechsler, "Golan Heights: The Deployment Debate," Plans and Analysis Group, International Security Affairs, Vol IV, 31 January 1994, 3, as quoted from *The New York Times*, 21 November 1994.
12. Thomas Moore and James Phillips, "Beware of Deploying U.S. Peacekeepers on the Golan Heights," *Background* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 1 February 1996) 6.
13. Andrew J. Bacevich, "Fear of Heights," *National Review*, 31 December 1995, 53.
14. Secretary of State James Baker stated at an 18 July 1991 news conference in Damascus: "We have not recognized the annexation of the Golan Heights by Israel." At an 18 September 1991 news conference, he stated: "We are also prepared to restate U.S. policy with respect to the non-recognition of the extension of Israeli law, administration, and jurisdiction to the Golan."

15. Farouk al-Sharaa, as quoted by *Compass Newswire*, New York, 3 October 1995.
16. Michael Eisenstadt, Senior Fellow, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, unpublished letter to the editor, 24 January 1995, 3.
17. Dore Gold, personal interview, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, Israel, 7 March 1996.
18. Rodman, 7.
19. Ze'ev Schiff, senior military correspondent, *Ha'aretz*, personal interview, Tel Aviv, Israel, 7 March 1996.
20. Richard L. Armitage, "Should We Patrol the Golan Heights?" *The Washington Times*, 10 March 1995, A21.
21. While in Jerusalem in January 1996, Defense Secretary William Perry made the strongest statement to date on providing a monitoring force: "If the peace agreement between Israel and Syria is reached . . . and if that calls for a peace monitoring force in the Golan Heights and if both Israel and Syria request the U.S. to participate in that, we are prepared to do that." As quoted by *The Boston Globe*, "U.S. Would Send Troops to Golan," 9 January 1995, 10.
22. Vincent Davis, "Levee en Masse, C'est Fini: The Deterioration of Popular Willingness to Serve," edited by John P. Lovell and Philip S. Kronenberg, *New Civil-Military Relations* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1974) 89.
23. Eisenstadt, unpublished letter to the editor, 1.
24. Michael Eisenstadt, personal interview, Washington, DC, 7 November 1995.
25. Hans Binnendijk, editor, *Strategic Assessment 1995, U.S. Security Challenges in Transition* (Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1995) 78.
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Chapter 4

Recommendations for Improvement

"U.S. security policy and strategies must be fundamentally reexamined . . . to cope with multidimensional challenges that go far beyond conventional warfare."¹

Antonia Chandler and George Raach

Assuming U.S. peacekeepers are necessary to establish and support a peace accord, this chapter proposes recommendations to enhance a Golan mission. Lessons from the past are considered, but the Golan will present its own unique challenges. The six recommendations below should be considered during the planning process to increase mission effectiveness and reduce the costs.

1. Adjust unit evaluation criteria to emphasize peace operations

For the most part, peacekeeping skills are different from those required for traditional warfare. If peacekeeping missions like the Golan are likely for the future, then those additional skills should be incorporated into the criteria used to evaluate units. In order to adapt to the increase in peace operations, the Army should continue to modify the way it measures unit readiness.

Although the Army does evaluate peacekeeping skills in some units, the assessment criteria have not been uniformly incorporated. The Unit Status Report does not require an appraisal of peacekeeping proficiency, although the commander has the option of including this information. Since the Army does not require this monthly feedback, a unit's skill level often

goes unmeasured. At the division level, most commanders have not incorporated peace operations into their Mission Essential Task List (METL), the standard by which training is focused and units are evaluated. If the evaluation criteria primarily measure warfighting skills, then units will naturally concentrate their training on this more traditional role. Training for peace operations would assume a lower priority, even though these skills may be likely required in the near future.

To improve its training and evaluation process, the Army should embed the unique elements of peace operations into its combat exercises. These anomalies would enhance rather than detract from a realistic portrayal of the future battlefield. Rapid changes in rules of engagement, interaction with civilians and warring factions, mediation, and numerous other skills should be routinely exercised in preparation for warfighting. The need for a mental shift from combat to peace operations was clearly illustrated following the invasion of Panama and in the aftermath of Desert Storm. Soldiers must be prepared to accommodate these rapid changes, and a high skill level can only be achieved through more comprehensive evaluations.

Although the Army does conduct extensive “spin-up” training for units preparing to deploy for a peace operation, relegating this mission to an ancillary status reveals a reluctance to support peacekeeping as a legitimate mission. Findings from independent commissions and governmental organizations note that peacekeeping missions are unpopular with the leadership of the armed forces, particularly at the unit level.² Some military leaders regard peacekeeping as one of many “collateral functions (those which cannot be used to justify funding or end strength) that detract from readiness.”³ This attitude permeates both the training and evaluation programs, and may not be beneficial to the Army. One officer remarked, “As we [the armed forces]

maneuver to avoid roles of non-military problems, we betray the trust placed in us by the citizens we are pledged to protect.”⁴

In addition to a shift in mindset, a Golan mission would require specialized training. As soldiers train for this mission, their performance should be measured against standards that measure peacekeeping skills. Only a revision of the Army’s readiness evaluation criteria at all levels will compel this change. Changes in attitudes will take longer, but they are no less important.

2. Coordinate in advance for training opportunities in theater

For the Golan mission to minimize cost to readiness, training opportunities must be addressed in the planning process, rather than after the unit has deployed. Both prior to deployment and once in theater, the soldiers would require training in area orientation, rules of engagement, and a host of other skills critical to the mission. Although the unit’s warfighting ability would be degraded with this diversion of its attention, in-theater training opportunities in support of its METL should be negotiated in advance with Syria and Israel.

Deficiencies in the MFO underscore the need to pursue improvement. Although conditions have changed since the MFO was established, it can still serve as an example of political and operational barriers associated with a mission’s mandate. The XVIII Airborne Corps MFO manual acknowledges, “There will be many restraints on this effort [to conduct unit essential training] caused by the force mandate.”⁵ During the early stages, U.S. forces could not conduct any live-fire maneuver exercises, and only recently have they been allowed to train at

the platoon level. The mandate also imposes limitations on equipment. Some weapons, such as mortars and precision munitions, must be left at home station, impacting weapons delivery proficiency. Other munitions such as fragmentation grenades, light anti-tank weapons, mines, and dragons have been forbidden in live-fire training.⁶

In contrast, some of these concerns were addressed during Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti. After the 10th Mountain Division established a safe environment, it established a live-fire range complex to maintain proficiency. This complex enabled soldiers to conduct weapons qualification and live-fire maneuver training up to company level.⁷ With this training asset in place, the division was able to rotate units from security missions in Haiti to the practice range. This effort to maintain combat proficiency minimized the training time required when the unit redeployed.

Although the political and geographic situations vary between missions, the Golan should offer opportunities for in-theater training. If the Army plans a Golan mission, it should consider every training opportunity in advance, e.g. live-fire maneuver exercises, military to military liaison programs, and readiness exercises for support units. Prior coordination is essential to minimize the degradation of combat readiness.

3. Keep the deployment rotation short, with four months as the target

As much as any other factor, the tour length of a deployment affects the unit's combat readiness and quality of life. Budgetary constraints usually dictate rotation schedules, resulting in longer tour lengths than military planners would prefer. Mission readiness, retraining time,

and quality of life issues can become secondary considerations.

In conjunction with the combat readiness issue previously discussed in Chapter 2, the soldiers' quality of life is a major concern for military leaders. Frequent overseas deployments to remote locations take their toll. Troop morale is a frequent casualty on long peacekeeping deployments. A study of the MFO mission found "troops' disaffection with peacekeeping grows in relation to how long they are on duty."⁸ As the Sergeant Major of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force reported, many young soldiers were "bailing out after their first hitch, because our operational commitments have been burning them out."⁹ This view is supported by the Marine Corps reenlistment statistics in that "only 16 percent of the eligible Marines reenlisted [during 1993-94] after their first four-year term, down from nearly 40 percent during the mid 1980s."¹⁰ Although they are not the only factor, frequent deployments affect morale and retention.

To understand the soldiers' concern, it is helpful to look at the demographics of today's military, which is quite different from the military of twenty years ago. According to military sociologist Charles Moskos, soldiers are marrying younger than their civilian counterparts.¹¹ Only 25 years ago, fewer than 15 percent of the soldiers were married, and those were mostly senior officers; today, nearly 65 percent of the soldiers are married. The number of single parents and married service members with dependents is also increasing.¹²

As Golan planners consider the human factors, it is difficult to strike the perfect balance between peacekeeping effectiveness and degradation to combat capability. From the studies on the subject, it is clear that "repeated, extended deployments affect morale and retention and, as a result, long-term readiness."¹³ The recommendation of a four-month tour length comes from

experience such as that of the 10th Mountain Division during its deployment to Haiti. Commanders in Haiti found that this rotation schedule did not significantly degrade combat readiness or morale.¹⁴ A four-month rotation for the Golan balances the need for mission continuity with the unit's combat readiness and quality of life.

4. Improve unit-level political and cultural training

In the political arena, a peacekeeper's evenhanded approach is of utmost diplomatic importance. Setting the correct tone, both with the Israelis and Syrians, would be crucial from the start. U.S. soldiers deployed abroad often serve as ambassadors of their nation. With the high visibility of the Golan mission and probable media coverage, the actions or statements of a single soldier can have worldwide political ramifications. Each soldier needs an appreciation of the political scenario and cultural sensitivities of the region. Predeployment and in-theater training will be essential. Although the Army conducts this training, it often does not provide the necessary depth. Under current conditions, as a unit prepares to deploy on a peacekeeping mission, the unit-level training tends to gloss over important aspects of culture and politics. Consequently, the average soldier is not well versed in the regional situation. To produce a better peacekeeper, the solution is to provide greater extent and depth of education that is tailored to both rank and position. This training should encompass politics, cultural differences, religion, and regional customs. It could prove essential if the soldiers interact with disgruntled Israelis and anxious Syrians. As Ambassador Oakley observed in Somalia, “understanding the local political dynamic was imperative in order to avoid unnecessary pitfalls and maximize both

popular and factional support.”¹⁵

As soldiers perform their mission, they will be closely observed at times by the international media. They need to understand how to accommodate media requests without interfering with their duties. As one journalist commented, “[the military] must learn to swim in the sea of information, rather than hold back the tide.”¹⁶ The media would be an integral feature of the operating theater and working with them is always more effective than working against them. Peacekeepers who are about to plunge into the Golan fishbowl can learn from the recent headline: “American Military’s Bluntness [in Bosnia] Irritates Warring Factions and Some in NATO.”¹⁷ The point was further underscored by The White House’s swift reprimand of the responsible ground commander for his candid remarks.

5. Obtain public and Congressional support before deployment

Immediate, widespread support for a Golan mission is doubtful. The words “U.S. military on the Golan Heights” are apt to elicit an emotional reaction from all concerned. The Middle East is often viewed as a quagmire, and overall U.S. peacekeeping success has been uneven. But many U.S. citizens do not yet fully appreciate the value of an Israeli-Syrian accord to the Middle East peace process as a whole. A majority might come to support a peacekeeping mission if they had more information. Policy makers should explain and debate the various options before committing troops. Under present circumstances, with limited public and Congressional support, the executive branch should not act unilaterally.

Public opinion clearly influences a mission, as it did in Somalia and Beirut. When the

Clinton administration wrote its policy on peace operations (Presidential Decision Directive 25), it included public and Congressional support as important considerations. Policy makers, both military and civilian, should focus on U.S. national interests, conduct an honest assessment of the costs, risks, and benefits, and keep Congressional leaders informed. Ultimately, it will be public and Congressional support that are essential for a lengthy commitment.

6. Establish an exit strategy

Because of the long-term nature of a Golan mission, it will be difficult to define a precise exit strategy. However, this should not prevent policy makers from developing exit criteria in the planning stage.

Unfortunately, many peacekeeping missions are haunted by the perception that they will continue forever. Open-ended missions like the MFO illustrate the problematic nature of defining an exit strategy, with U.S. troops still deployed to the Sinai after more than 15 years of peaceful coexistence. The MFO was conceived under different circumstances and has an undefined endpoint.¹⁸ This uncertainty, however, should not apply to the Golan. At the opposite end of the spectrum, terminating a mission based on an arbitrary timeline, as in the one-year Bosnian commitment, would not work either. As one senior ground force commander commented, “I don’t think we’re out of here in 12 months, not if we want this thing to work.”¹⁹

If previous missions do not serve as a guide, what would work in the Golan? At the outset, the framework for an exit strategy should be established during the negotiation phase of the accord. This strategy should define measurable gates of success, for example, progress with

regard to the security arrangements or cessation of terrorist activity. These gates could include a time element, but more importantly, they should define events or actions which measure effectiveness. Negotiators could also establish provisions for self-policing by Israel and Syria after the mission has progressed through several of the gates.

An explicit exit strategy may not be possible, but decision makers can establish goals, guidelines, and criteria. Without question, a Golan mission would require patience. As one analyst of the Somalian experience summarized, “Peace operations may require years to achieve the desired effects because the underlying causes of confrontation and conflict rarely have a clear beginning or a decisive resolution.”²⁰ Certainly an exit cannot occur with a “cold” peace, such as the one between Egypt and Israel. When starting from the “Arctic peace”²¹ with Syria, it may take a generation to warm.

Notes

1. Antonia Handler Chayes and George T. Raach, "Beyond Fighting and Winning," in Antonia Handler Chayes and George T. Raach, editors, *Peace Operations: Developing An American Strategy* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1995) 3.
2. Patrick Pexton, "Study: Troops Half-hearted on Peacekeeping," *Army Times*, 24. This reluctance to support peace operations was also noted by the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, Issue Paper (Peace Operations), 31 March 1995, page 2: "They [peace operations] are seen by many military planners as detracting from the ability of the force to deal with conflict." This document was drafted to support the Department of Defense, *Directions for Defense: Report of the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 1995).
3. George T. Raach, "Military Perspectives on Peace Operations," in Antonia Handler Chayes and George T. Raach, editors, *Peace Operations: Developing An American Strategy* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1995) 85.
4. Ralph Peters, "After the Revolution," *Parameters* (Carlisle Barracks, PA.: U.S. Army War College, Summer 1995) 13.
5. *XVIII ABN Corps Standard Operating Procedures to Support the MFO* (FT Bragg, NC: XVIII Airborne Corps and FT Bragg, 18 October 1995) C-28.
6. *XVIII ABN Corps*, G-16.
7. 10th Mountain Division, *Operations in Haiti, Planning/Preparation/Execution, August 1994 thru January 1995* (FT Drum, NY: 10th Mountain Division, 1995) 16-1.
8. Pexton, 24.
9. Al Santoli, "When It's Tougher Here Than Over There," *Parade*, 28 May 1995, 4, quoting Sergeant Major Michael McGraw, USMC.
10. Santoli, 4.
11. Charles Moskos, personal interview, 17 January 1996, Harvard University. For military: mean age at first marriage for males is 23.5 years; for females 22 years. For civilians: mean age at first marriage for males is 27.5 years; for females 24.5.
12. Santoli, 4 and 5. The Army lists more than 22,000 single parents and the Navy lists 30,000.
13. Raach, 95.
14. 10th Mountain Division, 24-4.

15. John L. Hirsch and Robert B. Oakley, *Somalia and Operation Restore Hope, Reflections on Peacemaking and Peacekeeping*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1995) 157.
16. From a speech by Admiral Richard C. Macke, USCINCPAC, "Seven Parables of Peacekeeping," at the Peacekeeping Conference Banquet, 28 June 1995, Honolulu, Hawaii.
17. Thomas E. Ricks, "U.S. Brings to Bosnia Tactics That Tamed Wild West," *The Wall Street Journal*, 27 December 1995, A7.
18. The MFO was conceived with a Cold War strategy in mind. It was also the first in a series of bilateral agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbors. An Israeli-Syrian accord would be the final agreement in the series and could perhaps accelerate the exit of the MFO. These ideas were discussed in an interview on 5 May 1996 with Professor Walid Khalidi, Senior Research Fellow, Center for Middle East Studies, Harvard University. A 1995 General Accounting Office report summarized the State Department view by stating that the MFO "should remain in place until regional peace is achieved." See General Accounting Office, Report to Congress, *Peacekeeping: Assessment of U.S. Participation in the Multinational Force and Observers* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 15 August 1995) GAO/NSIAD-95-113, e-mail reference Chapter 4:1.
19. Ricks, 7.
20. Kenneth Allard, *Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, January 1995) 8.
21. Dore Gold used the term "Arctic peace" in an interview at the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, Israel, 7 March 1996.

Chapter 5

Final Reflections

"We're in the business of conflict prevention."

Togo D. West, Jr., Secretary of the Army

Although much of the U.S. public perceives Middle East conflicts as unsolvable, an Israeli-Syrian peace accord would substantially advance U.S. regional interests. Furthermore, the issues raised by a Golan deployment have ramifications for the larger debate on the U.S. peacekeeping role in general. Discussions on peacekeeping can be emotionally charged and politically motivated, often conjuring images like an American corpse being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. It is critical, therefore, to assess each new mission on its own merit in terms of cost, risks, and benefits for the United States.

Beyond this assessment, Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD-25), the Clinton administration's guide for U.S. policy on intervention can be used as a tool for evaluating prospective missions. From the authors' preliminary assessment, a Golan mission would meet the intent of the PDD-25 criteria (see Appendix 1). However, long-term solutions for Golan peacekeeping are not clear-cut. Self-policing by Israel and Syria would be ideal, with United Nations peacekeeping (without U.S. participation) as the next best choice. Since neither of these options is viable, the United States may be asked to play the role of peacekeeper. As the world recognizes U.S. leadership and military credentials for such missions, requests for U.S.

peacekeepers are likely to increase. Therefore, the military should continue to adjust its doctrine, structure, and culture to enhance its capability of performing peacekeeping missions of the future.

Appendix 1

Golan Peacekeeping and PDD-25

Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD-25) can be used as a tool when considering a possible peacekeeping operation. President Clinton approved the new policy on peace operations on 3 May 1994. The directive established guidelines and conditions for deciding whether to commit U.S. forces to peacekeeping missions. When introducing the new directive, National Security Advisor Anthony Lake stated that the United States does not “have either the mandate, nor the resources, nor the possibility of resolving every conflict.”¹

PDD-25 stipulates that U.S. interests will be used as the basis for decisions to intervene, although those interests are not actually defined in the document. It does state that peace operations can serve as a “force multiplier” and could “advance American as well as collective interests in maintaining peace in key regions.” It also specifies that while some conflicts “may not directly threaten American interests, their cumulative effect is significant.”²

In the table below, the authors consider a Golan mission in light of the nine factors outlined in the public version of PDD-25.

<i>PDD-25 Factors</i>	<i>Application to the Golan</i>
Participation advances U.S. interests. Risk to Americans is acceptable	Yes
Personnel, funds, and other resources are available	Yes
U.S. participation is necessary for the operation's success	Yes
There are clear objectives and an endpoint can be identified	Clear objectives--yes Defined endpoint--to be determined
Domestic and Congressional support exists or can be marshaled	Probable
Command and control arrangements are acceptable	High probability
There exists a determination to commit sufficient forces to achieve defined objectives	Yes
There exists a plan to achieve the objectives decisively	Probable
There exists a commitment to reassess and adjust the composition of U.S. forces	Probable

Notes

1. Victoria K. Holt, *Briefing Book on Peacekeeping: The U.S. Role in United Nations Peace Operations* (Washington DC: Council for a Livable World Education Fund, March 1995) 17.
2. The White House, *The Clinton Administration's Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations*, Public version (Washington DC: The White House, May 1994) 1.

Appendix 2

Background on the Golan

The Golan is a semi-mountainous area of land measuring approximately 400 square miles. Its north-south length is approximately 40 miles and the east-west width varies between 8 and 16 miles. Elevations generally range from 400 to 3,000 feet with its highest point at Mount Hermon, which is 7296 feet. Prior to 1967, Syria claims that 120,000 of its citizens resided in the Golan. Today, it is populated by approximately 14,000 Israelis and 17,000 Druze who live under Israeli law.

At the end of World War I, during the division of the Ottoman Empire, the Golan was included in the territory of British Mandate Palestine. In 1923, the territory was transferred to French Mandate Syria under a Franco-British agreement delineating the boundary between Mandate Syria and Mandate Palestine. After Israel declared its independence in 1948, it defeated an Arab coalition which attacked the new state. The armistice signed in 1949 included the Golan as part of Syria, but did not establish a clearly defined border.

For the next 18 years, Syria and Israel skirmished in and around the demilitarized zone. During the Six Day War of 1967, Israel captured the Golan and established defensive positions. Six years later, at the outbreak of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Syria mounted a massive armored attack into the territory. In a costly battle, the IDF stopped the advance and counter-attacked, driving a 15 mile bulge into Syria.¹ Israel later withdrew, but remained on the Golan. In 1974,

the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) was deployed to a narrow strip of land on the eastern side of the area to monitor the cease-fire.

In 1981, Israel enacted legislation extending its civil law and administration to the Golan, replacing its previous temporary authority. Today, approximately 14,000 Israelis have settled in the area. After the Israeli elections in June 1992, Prime Minister Yitshak Rabin began peace negotiations with Syria under American auspices.² Throughout the process, Syria's President Hafez Assad has steadfastly insisted on the complete return of the Golan. He abruptly terminated the talks in July 1995. After Rabin's assassination in November 1995, Prime Minister Shimon Peres and President Assad resumed negotiations.

The Golan is strategically significant for both Israel and Syria. The high elevations provide line-of-sight surveillance and early warning capability. Control of the Golan provides both a defensive buffer zone and deterrence. With Israeli armored divisions stationed on the Golan, the IDF is within easy striking distance of Damascus. Since 1967, the Golan has provided Israel with a topographical advantage that helps offset Syria's quantitative superiority.³

The Golan highlands form a watershed that supplies approximately 30 percent of Israel's water.⁴ Two of the three springs that feed the Jordan River are in the area. The Jordan, along with numerous other mountain streams, feeds the Sea of Galilee (Lake Kinneret) which is a major source of Israel's water. Prior to 1967, Syria made several attempts to divert some of the water supply, but the IDF intervened. Since water is a strategic resource in the region, both Syria and Israel fear that access to water could be used as a weapon in the event a peace accord fails.

Notes

1. Douglas J. Feith, et. al., *U.S. Forces on the Golan Heights: An Assessment of Benefits and Costs* (Washington DC: The Center for Security Policy, 25 October 1994) 2.
2. Thomas Moore and James Phillips, "Beware of Deploying U.S. Peacekeepers on the Golan Heights," *Backgrounder* (Washington DC: The Heritage Foundation, 1 February 1996) 3.
3. Dore Gold, *U.S. Forces on the Golan Heights and Israeli-Syrian Security Arrangements* (Tel Aviv University: August 1994) 6.
4. Moore and Phillips, 3.

Appendix 3

Key Golan Dates

Jun 1949	Armistice between Israel and Syria--Golan is Syrian territory
Jun 1967	Israel captures Golan in Six Day War
Oct 1973	Israel repels Syrian attack and retains Golan
Jun 1974	United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) deploys
Dec 1981	Israel formally annexes Golan; declares Israeli law in effect
Sep 1993	President Clinton and Secretary of State Christopher announce U.S. willingness to provide military forces to support an Israeli-Syrian accord
Jan 1996	Secretary of Defense Perry reiterates U.S. willingness to provide forces

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